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# Global Media, Globalised Cultures: Contingency Or Coincidence?

*Discourses on globalisation still tend to treat the media, particularly television, as an independent cause of cultural change within societies. However this synthesis of media, communications, cultural studies and sociology literature on globalisation suggests rather that there is multi-directional causality between media and culture in the process. Thus globalisation of the media and culture does not necessarily spell imperialism of one by the other, but is often characterised by two-way interaction at both global and local levels. Furthermore the politico-economic integration of nation-states and the place of multinational corporations in the capitalist world-system have significant impact on media and culture. The consequence seems to be hybrid cultural identities in postmodern societies which have access to transnational media and are subject to global marketing. In highlighting research in the late 20th century, this paper suggests that academic theorising and social policy-making in which global media and local culture are characterised as sole or at least dominant players are wholly inadequate, even defective.*

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Geostationary satellites, digital transmission, optical fibre, satellite television, mobile telephony, computer networks and electronic mail are among the many forms of technology which have revolutionised global communications in recent decades. Although advocates of these new technologies claim access to information will lead to greater democratisation within societies and equality between nations, critics point out that in reality such technologies perpetuate the status quo of inequity and dependency. For on a global level development and control of such state-of-the-art technologies lie with developed countries and their multinational corporations, and their services distributed selectively to developing countries and regions. Within countries, control and access to communications are often largely in the

hands of the local elite with transnational cultural and economic links. Thus this section of the literature review will examine critically the dynamics of the widely perceived and much vaunted globalisation of culture and society,. Since corporate and government decisions concerning media technologies and software are being made increasingly in a global context, so must transnational satellite television in Asia be analysed and understood, hence this review of the literature on media globalisation.

## New Media Technologies

The idea of using geostationary satellites as a means of global communications has been attributed to a broadcast engineer and science-fiction writer, Arthur Clarke who in 1945 spelt out the technical criteria necessary. Satellites in geostationary berths above the equator orbit the earth at the same speed as the earth rotates and thus stay above the same location. Beams broadcast from their transponders can cover up to a third of the world's surface at a time which constitutes their footprints. This renders distances on earth immaterial since the distance of one city from the satellite is practically the same as it is from another (Frederick, 1993). Thus for a signal to travel from Singapore to Jakarta via a satellite such AsiaSat1 is the same time and cost as for it to travel from Beijing to Cairo. Applied to television, satellite technology has meant that costs of broadcasting are independent of audience distance, while costs of downlinking and redistribution of signals are low. Uplinking is possible from mobile earth stations anywhere within its footprint or reception zone on the earth's surface for the satellite's signal., as is downlinking via a satellite dish-antennae, thus making control of access difficult.

Though an increasing number of developing countries have launched satellites for domestic telecommunications purposes, they continue to be dependent on developed countries for technology manufacture and maintenance, and are relatively minor players on the global stage. Hamelink (1983) argues that technologies such as satellite television remain concentrated in the hands of developed or core countries and their services are disseminated to developing or periphery countries, to borrow the terminology of 'world-systems' theory. Though he neglects to point out that even within developing countries control over these communications technologies tends to be concentrated in the hands of technocrats in urban centres from which information flows uni-directionally to the rural hinterlands. Furthermore developing countries such as those being researched here in Asia are more often in the footprint of broadcast satellites owned by developed countries and their multinational corporations (MNCs)

than vice-versa. Dissenting from the optimistic free-market view of governments and business, Hamelink questions the consequences of deregulation for local autonomy in the broadcasting industries of developing countries.

With the availability of these new transnational media technologies, decisions concerning programming software and target audiences are naturally being made increasingly on a global basis by commercial entities. Still unrepentant of his long-held views on media imperialism, Schiller (1991) highlights the shift of control from the nation to the transnational corporation which is evident in television programming, sports, politics, language and other elements of culture even in countries that maintained a strong national culture. The so-called indigenisation of television, is seen by him as no more than a copy of US television genre, replete with all the values and behaviour norms necessary for persuading consumption of the goods produced by MNCs. Denigrating 'active audience', cultural studies and postmodern viewpoints, Schiller alleges that these MNCs, largely Western media conglomerates, are responsible not just for media imperialism via television because they are able to offer a total cultural package via film, printed publications, theme parks, shopping malls and more. By the same token, transnational satellite television would be just one element of wider cultural imperialism, and be set to dominate the media and cultural landscape of Asian countries.

## Broadcast Commercial- isation

Alleging that media content and thus social consciousness globally were being controlled indirectly by the majority of transnational corporations through advertising, Nordenstreng and Schiller (1979) promote the concept of national sovereignty over media. Nonetheless they acknowledged that the developing world then could not be divided into capitalist versus socialist spheres of influence, and that the elite across all nations may already be part of a global economic and informational system. Mattelart (1983) also contends that transnational firms dominate national culture and in evidence he cites the Nordenstreng and Varis (1974) research on dominant programme flows especially from the US, plus further information on news and programming distribution networks and transnational advertising agencies. A decade later UNESCO-sponsored research on the international television programme flows in 50 countries by Varis (1988) found that the global average of imported programmes was still approximately one-third of total programme time. However the latter study reported that there was wider variation between nations as to their imports and that much of the imported

programming was predominantly from nations in the same politico-economic or geo-linguistic regions rather than from the US.

Nonetheless Schiller (1989) himself remains convinced that the reality in television broadcasting is one of increased domination of culture by largely US corporate interests. He sees the US withdrawal from support of UNESCO in the 1980s on the pretext of defending press freedom, as a conspiracy to undermine the prime regulatory body of its cultural industries. Furthermore, the US exercised its deregulatory crusade through the World Bank/IMF stipulations requiring the privatisation of broadcasting before loans were granted to developing countries. Since public broadcasting proves expensive for developing countries and is often not able to gain the popular support, commercial broadcasters who are able to attract advertising revenue will be tend to be encouraged instead. Yet the experience of satellite television in Western Europe, as Collins (1991) reveals, has been that despite exploiting weak national government regulation undermined further by the European Union directives and being backed by major media conglomerates, the channels have not been very successful. He argues that it ultimately depends rather on their ability to attract subscribers which in turn is dependent on cost-benefit analysis by consumers of satellite channel offerings versus terrestrial television and video. This means that satellite broadcasters have often had to outbid terrestrial broadcasters and other satellite broadcasters for rights to programming or vertically integrate to lower costs.

The prevalence of foreign programming may have to do with the country's differing histories with television. Researching rural communities in Brazil, Kottak (1991) discerns stages in the impact of the medium: a first stage of novelty and mesmerisation by the medium, a second of selective acceptance and reworking of the message, a third of community saturation and lack of differentiation among viewers, and a fourth of a national television culture. Research in the Dominican Republic points to programme genre being a significant factor in determining country of origin of the more popular programmes. For example, local news and variety shows from the republic itself, telenovelas from the Latin American region, feature films, action series, foreign news, children's and scientific programmes from US and Europe (Straubhaar and Viscasillas, 1991). Programmes of local and other Latin American origin enjoy considerable popularity among locals there, particularly among the lower-middle to lower classes and have displaced US imports over the years. In revealing the domination of local television broadcasters, Televisa in Mexico and Globo in Brazil, and their successful forays into Hispanic markets

in the rest of Latin America, Europe and even North America via programme production and satellite television, Sinclair (1992) makes the case that the cultural imperialism thesis is in need of re-definition.

Even in the 1980s, Collins et al (1988) suggest that neither the US nor UK had a monopoly of programming exports when Japan and Mexico have carved out successful niches globally, and ridicule alarm over imported values ones as conservative. Some Third World programming, notably soap operas have gone on to enjoy almost universal appeal. The Japanese creation *Oshin*, for instance, has been broadcast in over 30 countries ranging from Belgium to Indonesia, often all 297 episodes worth, because it had achieved iconic status, not to mention precipitated social change (Svenkerud et al, 1995). On the other hand, ardent cultural imperialism theorists like Mattelart (1983) are sceptical of this so-called Third World media development, arguing that it is confined to a minority of unique nations, still represents technological dependence, promotes consumption by extensive advertising and recreates colonial structures of communication. This view may find some basis, though, in the African context where the heavy use of imported television fiction programming is attributed to financial constraints of local production, television penetration being largely confined to the urban areas, the difficulty of catering to the diversity of languages of rural and illiterate populations, and the lack of broadcasting planning and policy (Ndumbu, 1991).

## International Regulation

The call for a New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO) stemmed from a new realisation of the role of the media in the social, cultural, political and economic spheres of developing countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America. These former colonies were disenchanted with the media imperialism they were being subjected to mainly from the US. The desire of countries such as Indonesia, India and China being researched here to harness their cultural industries in the pursuit socio-economic development and to redress imbalances in the worldwide flows of news and television programming was expressed in a number of international forums such as the Non-Aligned Movement, International Telecommunications Union (ITU), UN and UNESCO in the 1970s. Seeing it as a threat to its own economic interests, the US waged a counter campaign to discredit the proponents of NWICO by alleging that they were against freedom of the press and were for repressive control of the media by the state, which blinkered to its own controls (Roach, 1987). On the instructions of its 1976 general conference of member countries UNESCO established an International Commission for

the Study of Communication Problems chaired by Sean McBride after whom the commission and its report is popularly named. The Commission enlarged on its brief and addressed a whole gamut of global communications issues including government controls on media, information flows, freedom and responsibility of the press, protection of journalists, commercialisation of the mass media, media ownership, the revolution in communications technology, and cultural policies (Kleinwachter, 1993).

The MacBride Commission report (1980) began with a review of the current state of communications but said little about satellite and cable systems. At that time Intelsat and Intersputnik were the only transnational satellites and other systems were either domestic, marine/aeronautical and military, while cable television was then strictly a North American and West European phenomenon. Instead the Commission commented on language diversity, literacy, traditional media, mass media technology, cooperative news dissemination and the growth of entertainment and leisure, before dealing with more controversial issues such as dominance of communications by transnational corporations, state subsidies and monopolies in the media, regional disparities in consumption of communication products.

Finally under the rubric of 'problems and issues of common concern' the MacBride report (1980) attacked imbalances in news and programming flows and distortion of their content, caused both through censorship by governments and the commercial imperatives of media conglomerates, problems which have intensified with the advent of transnational television via commercial satellites. Among the Commission's recommendations relevant to this research was one that developing countries develop their own broadcast systems, including training and production facilities, adding that national production of broadcast materials was crucial to reducing dependency on external sources. Outdated as it might seem now, the report called for the ITU to study the utilisation of satellites in international communications, to coordinate the equitable sharing of the geostationary orbit and to offer discounted rates on the use of satellite systems by developing countries.

Even prior to the publication of the MacBride Commission report, UNESCO adopted the Mass Media Declaration in 1978 which stressed the responsibility of mass media to promote peace, international understanding and human rights. The same year the UN General Assembly adopted a similar resolution and the next year it established the UN Committee on Information to promote the NWICO concept. In 1980 the UNESCO conference adopted the MacBride Report and established the International Programme for the Development of Communication (IPDC), both



actions being ratified by the UN that same year. This led to the US and UK withdrawal of membership and therefore financial support from UNESCO in late 1984 alleging plans to restrict press freedoms and human rights (MacBride and Roach, 1993). Despite further roundtables, conferences, and resolutions, the NWICO ideal was never achieved, in large part because programmes for its development suffered from UNESCO financial constraints (Kleinwachter, 1993).

Over a decade later UNESCO convened another commission in 1993, this time on Culture and Development, which in its report called for recognition of diversity and encouragement of competition in national broadcasting through public, commercial and community sources. On the level of international broadcasting it recommends the imposition of a form of cultural tax on satellite radio and television services for using the 'global commons' of airwaves and outer space, the revenue from which could be utilised to alternative international and regional public broadcasts (Pérez de Cuéllar, 1995). Whether these commendable ideas are simply platitudes or will be acted upon by the international community is yet to be seen.

At the centre of the NWICO debate at UNESCO in the 1980s was the issue of media imperialism, itself a part of the larger issue of cultural imperialism in a post-colonial or neo-colonial world. Cultural imperialism is said to occur when the cultures of developed or core countries are dominant in developing or peripheral countries, and this is said to be symptomatic of politico-economic dependency or a similar exploitative relationship. The developed world's ignorance of other countries' cultures and history, and interest in its own political and economic agenda has tragic consequences for the developing world, as Said (1994) argues. He traces the history of imperialism in 'Western' culture from 19th century colonial literature right down to the mass media of today. Said sees cultural imperialism illustrated by European colonisation of Asia and Africa in the past, or more recently by US actions during the Gulf War. As evidence of such cultural imperialism in the media Golding (1977) had observed that models of broadcast systems in many independent Third World nations were usually similar to that of their former colonists. If most television programmes were imported from developed countries it was both because of the higher cost of local production and the entertainment tastes of the local elite.

So he concluded that there can be no value-free technology either when the training provided in television production replicates what was done in the First World without regard to the

## Media Imperialism



objectives to which the media might be used in the Third World. Whatever is produced locally is a often clone of foreign programmes again because of their low-cost formats and yet gives a veneer of pseudo-indigenisation to satisfy regulatory requirements.

The free-market capitalist argument, on the other hand, holds that freedom of information flows across borders is enshrined in the UN declaration and that development journalism is a euphemism for the control of the press by governments under the pretext of mobilising economic growth (Kelly, 1976). Others of the market school would go further and question the assumption that financial and economic control of the media is tantamount to its political control (Vasquez, 1983). By contrast the Marxist/socialist thinkers would argue that the principle of national sovereignty gives governments a legitimate right to decide the cultural policies and to harness the media in promoting national development. For instance, Hamelink (1983) makes an impassioned plea for cultural autonomy and dissociation from the developed world, citing the positive experiences of a number of developing, often socialist countries in resisting cultural synchronisation with the 'West' in the 1950-70s. He calls on developing nations to develop alternative information policies, and offers suggestions of how both native as well as foreign communications resources could be adapted to support their social and economic development.

Most formulations of cultural imperialism are largely based on economic perspectives but on the issue of the media, socialist control may be no less acceptable than capitalist domination to Third World countries. To avoid ideological polemics, Lee (1980) attempts to re-define the more specific media imperialism as the composite of programme flows, ownership, transfers of broadcast systems, and promotion of capitalist worldviews/ lifestyles. He thinks the term cultural imperialism is preferred by those with a Marxist bent to imply wholesale domination of which the media is a mere symptom. Believing that developing countries cannot shut out technological change without widening the gap with developed countries, Lee suggests a compromise solution of regional cooperation, creative use of the media, and the synthesis of modern and traditional media as possible antidotes to media imperialism.

Similarly Ayish (1992) contends that developing nations may have to rethink their authoritarian orientation if they wish to be integrated into the information-based global economy. He proposes that they think of international communication primarily as information vital to politico-economic planning, rather than as cultural imperialism via the mass media. Both thinkers seem to

## Media And Social Change

accept the reality of media imperialism as a correlate of development, and suggest ways of contextualising, even exploiting it.

The role of mass media in social change, as functionalists have theorised, is to democratise access to and choice in cultural products, and facilitate gradual cultural change without threatening the social system. In fact modernisation was seen as a process by which empathy with the idea of social mobility was fostered through the mass media. Modernisation theorists have long advocated precipitating dissatisfaction with traditional life as a means of stimulating aspirations for the material benefits of modern society. Notably, Lerner (1958) claimed that the mass media was a key accelerator of the take-off into modernisation along with urbanisation, literacy and political participation.

On commission by UNESCO, Schramm (1964) had prescribed specific media policies for developing countries as a means of achieving modernisation and its benefits. He asserted that the mass media aided in widening horizons, focussing attention on development, raising expectations, and changing attitudes and values, among other positive effects. Thus many governments in the developing world introduced television as a means of promoting modernisation, either directly through development programming or indirectly through Westernised entertainment programming.

Influential as structural-functionalism was in media development, research on its hypotheses in the developing world bore equivocal results. Indeed when Rogers (1962) investigated diffusion of innovations, he found that the mass media were important to the earliest stage of awareness of innovations but it was interpersonal communication that was critical to the final stage of their adoption. This dependence on opinion leadership confirmed the two-step flow model of communication pioneered by Katz and Lazarfield (1955) which is often ignored in negative views about the social impact of new media.

Investigating the effect of modern institutions in developing countries, Inkeles and Smith (1974) found that schools were more influential upon personal modernity than the factory workplace and mass media, though the latter were quite powerful nonetheless. Advertising, in particular, has been seen as benefiting modernisation through encouraging competition, production efficiency, product innovations/variety and lower prices, as well as subsidising the mass media. But this assumes the dominance nationally of a commercial broadcasting system which gives viewers the right of choice, and programming that is produced

domestically to reflect values of the social system, as is generally true of the US. Thus development communications as propounded by theorists such as Lerner, McClelland, Pool and Schramm did not take into consideration the context of US hegemony of the world market, media industries, and international relations in the Cold War era (Sussman and Lent, 1991).

Critics charge that a structural-functionalist approach is deficient in explaining social change because it emphasises the elements that keep societies stable (Dahrendorf, 1973). But a risk of using the media to promote social change is that they may also cause rising expectations and intolerable frustration within a society, with the possible dysfunctional outcome of a populist revolution, as alleged in some developing countries. On the other hand, structural-functionalists might argue that such 'Western' media content has value as a form of escapist distraction or sedation for the masses, and is therefore functional in reducing social tension and political dissent in developing countries (Tunstall, 1977). However, it is the introduction of mass media over which governments could exercise no control, such as transnational satellite television, which has heightened fears that the steady development of their countries and their political hold could be undermined. This is because programming which promotes consumerist lifestyles and advertising of products is often available through this medium to their citizens well before other correlates of economic development, and is invariably at odds with national cultural policies.

### **Socio-cultural identities**

It is generally accepted that it was the communication of new ideas via print in universal vernacular languages rather than esoteric sacred languages or local dialects which helped form nation-states out of more traditional socio-political entities. Anderson (1983) detailed how the modern nation-state had its origins in the arrival of print which coincided with the growth of capitalism. Through a phenomenon he called 'print-capitalism', people who participated in a socio-linguistic market for print media such as books and newspapers began to feel connected with all others who did, leading to the formation of nation-states on the basis of common language. Similarly postcolonial nations of the Third World were defined either by an inherited colonial language, or a new, perhaps revived, 'national' language. Citizenship is an artificial construct, in as much as the nation-state is, which detaches people from other more real identities and forms a new pseudo-community of strangers. Cultural authenticity is often based on xenophobia for, as Hobsbawm (1990)

indicates, ideas of primordial ethnic identity have dubious roots and nationalistic self-determination seeks to recover irrecoverable history. Thus national culture was quite an unproblematic concept and taken for granted in the 1960s-70s, but it became increasingly questioned and problematised as a socio-cultural construct in the 1980s-90s.

Some social thinkers seem palpably less interested in analysing the obvious economic and political factors contributing to cultural globalisation such as imperialism and capitalism, than in mapping the cultural consequences on individuals, society, nation-states, even humanity as a whole. Spybey (1996), for one, is concerned particularly with how the globalisation of political, economic and cultural institutions affects participants in every social system in a process he terms 'reflexive modernity'. He thinks that the individuals exposed to information through these globalising processes have greater expectations of lifestyle choices and personal fulfilment, including both consumerism as well as alternative lifestyles and social causes. The ready availability of transnational satellite television enhances such exposure to cultural globalisation.

Morley and Robins (1995) speak of the difficulty of defining cultural identity in an era of postmodern geography where spaces are defined increasingly by electronic connectedness rather than physical proximity. Pertinent to this thesis is the evidence they point to of young people being the heaviest users of transnational television in Europe. But Ferguson (1993) cautions cultural thinkers and industry practitioners alike to differentiate between 'surface' identities which may reflect global consumerist trends and 'deep' identities which reflect the persistence, even renaissance, of ethnicity, religion, gender and the like. She deems the dominant myth in cultural industries of global cultural homogenisation to be as simplistic as the concept of national cultural purity.

In past decades the politics of cultural identity has been concerned with marginalised groups such as women, homosexuals and ethnic minorities finding a voice and being able to move centre-stage in the wider culture and society they are a part of (Foucault, 1978). This leads to the problem of speaking positions, or whether only those who inhabit the marginalised groups have the right experience to speak from and the only ones worthy to be listened to when speaking on behalf of the groups. Speaking positions is also an issue on a global level, one which Tomlinson (1991) also grapples with, of whether thinkers in the developed world can speak for those in the developing world.

While attempting to redress past silencing of minorities, this attitude taken unthinkingly to the extreme could mean that there can be little dialogue over cultural conflicts. Media research and

thought should attempt to give voice to those in the developing world as well as those the developed world who are equally concerned with issues of cultural globalisation, in order to facilitate engagement, even honest debate between them.

The concept of cultural hegemony can be traced to the Marxist perspective of Gramsci (1978) who saw the capitalist class convincing the working class to accept being ruled. But by the same token, a working class-led revolution would have first to free itself from the hegemony of the capitalist class and then to legitimise itself by dominating all institutions of society with its ideology and moral authority. So keen was Gramsci for Marxist ideology to be demonstrated in practice that he emphasised cultural rather than economic factors in his analysis of social change. According to this influential school of thought which grew into critical or cultural theory, 'culture' is to be seen not as something one absorbs unconsciously but as just an arena for the struggle against hegemony and towards authenticity. The process of a dominant social group winning the marginal groups' consent without overt coercion, though, has an inherent instability about it because cultural power has always to be negotiated and so is conflict-prone. A similar situation of cultural hegemony existed also between colonists and their overseas subjects, and might be said to exist between neo-colonial developed countries and economically-dependent developing countries today.

Critical theory holds that the mass media induces passivity and addiction in audiences, thus making them amenable to domination by the political and economic elite in society who often controlled the media. In its view, with industrialisation mass culture became a product for a mass market or audience, produced by a cultural industry. The central thesis of this theory propounded by the Frankfurt School in pre-War Germany, was that this commercialised mass culture was the means by which the capitalist system of mass production and consumption sustained itself.

In their seminal essay, Adorno and Horkheimer (1972) criticised the cultural industry, for mass-producing cultural products in the service of capitalist economies. As such, they claimed these products were unartistic and generic, pandering to the mass taste, and discouraging of intellectual response and that all forms of popular culture, including the mass media, traced their roots to the rise of the middle-class in Europe. Being rather elitist, they saw the media both as the means to subjugate the masses as well as the undoing of civilisation as they idealised it rather belatedly in the industrial age. Government leaders and the social-political elite of developing countries today tend to share the

## Cultural Hegemony

## Televised Culture

Critical Theorists disdain of mass culture particularly of foreign origin or of a hybrid foreign/local nature, while paradoxically keen to harness the tools of mass media to control the masses through promoting a subservient national culture.

The impact of the medium of television on societies which have had a long tradition of print media has intrigued many social thinkers. In McLuhan's (1964) view, oral and instant communication which characterised the new electronic media was re-tribalising human society, emphasising touch and sound over vision. As a leading technological determinist, he would rebut Gerbner's view on the cultivation effects of media with the categorical claim for which he was famed, that 'the medium was the message'. Another dictum of McLuhan was that 'the media was the massage', a more colourful expression for his argument that the medium impressed its own message on the audience, subordinating the actual content it was carrying. Through television the world had become, in his estimation, an electronic global village where there was extreme awareness and curiosity about other cultures. But it is unclear whether McLuhan was implying that television was globalising culture since, among other things, the process has not been accompanied by greater social harmony and tolerance. Perhaps he meant only that all viewers of television were participants in a televised culture regardless of what they watched or where they were located around the world.

While by no means targeting McLuhan directly, Ellul (1985) contends that personal communications for human relationships cannot be achieved through the mass media, thus implying that the world can never become a global village. In Ellul's view, television images are inimical to interpersonal discourse, intellectual reflection and social action. Taking a different tack, Esslin (1982) expresses the concern that accepting the dictum that the medium is the message leads to neglect of the other messages carried by television. In any case McLuhan has had no shortage of critics who have accused him of coining clever metaphors, overstating the case, and developing unprovable theories (Stearn, 1968). Yet in the intuitive appeal of his ideas to the wider public, policy-makers and media practitioners, even if not to social scientists and media theorists, lay the root of McLuhan's success.

To this day purveyors of satellite communications, are fond of citing his 'global village' and 'medium is the message' metaphors in promoting the benefits of their technology while ignoring the more negative connotations he implied by them. Certainly McLuhan made no overt comment about ownership of the media and control of the technology, and could be assumed to



have imbibed an uncritical right-wing view towards economic development and social change.

Rejecting both optimistic and pessimistic views of media impact, Baudrillard (1988) expounds the view that the mass media do not simply distort reality but are a new social reality. Television images which distort time and space, he believes, have caused our culture to consist primarily of simulations. As a post-structuralist/postmodernist, Baudrillard defines simulation as not only presenting the imaginary as real, but also defines objects and discourses as having neither origin, referent or standard. Consumer lifestyles provide people with their identity in society rather than their role in the economic production system and thus people are incorporated into the 'simulacra' they surround themselves with.

In a somewhat technological-determinist style reminiscent of McLuhan, Baudrillard proclaims that the media, especially television, overwhelms with information and renders impossible any true feedback from its audience even by polls, and thus are a form of pseudo-communication. The only way that the masses can avoid the influence of the media, according to him, will be to avoid watching it themselves or to be shielded from it by authorities. The former is an unlikely scenario since the masses worldwide seem to find the media an irresistible form of entertainment and information, while the latter is what some governments in Asia have endeavoured to do with transnational satellite television with dubious success.

Postmodernity, like globalisation, is a phenomenon over which there is little consensus of definition in part because it is discussed in art, architecture, history, literature and sociology among other disciplines. Lyotard (1984) characterises postmodernism as a new era marked by scepticism towards meta-narratives or those ideological systems which give bearing, purpose and meaning to life in the past. Thus all aspects of life can have no objective reality or meta-code by which to be judged, only the 'hypereality' of meanings relative to each other. On the other hand Jameson (1984) portrays postmodern society primarily as a consumer society characterised by pastiche and schizophrenia, eroding distinctions between reality and imagination. In his view postmodernism is in continuity with modernism and simply the cultural logic of late capitalism, a mere shift from imperialistic and market capitalism towards social heterogeneity without a collective project and lacking any norms.

Similarly Harvey (1989) considers postmodernism to be characterised by fragmentation and chaos, making it impossible to attempt a comprehensive worldview. He notes a collapsing of

## Postmodern Society



time-horizons and a propensity to spectacle in postmodern culture, as demonstrated by trends in popular culture from fashion and architecture to advertising and television. Culture is seen as a random series of freely intersecting texts, the total meaning of which is relative to each participant. Notably for this paper, Harvey attributes a shaping role to television, a medium quintessentially postmodern in its collation of images past and present, from far and near into an endless, uniform stream of spectacle which is piped into homes.

In the postmodern societies as with globalised cultures, time and space are reordered such that events that are far away and at a different time intrude on the experience of people and seem more significant than their local situation, often through the 'mediation' of the mass media. One of the leading thinkers on globalisation, Giddens (1991) understands the concept as the 'interlacing of social events and social relations "at a distance" with local contextualities'. Augmenting this viewpoint is another major theorist on globalisation, Robertson (1992) who believes that it 'refers to both the compression of the world and the intensification of consciousness of the world as a whole.. both concrete global interdependence and consciousness of the global whole in the twentieth century'. He claims that societies are converging in economic and technological aspects but diverging especially in social relational aspects, while staying the same in other aspects.

Yet another conceptualisation of the relationship of the parts and the whole is Braman and Sreberny-Mohammadi (1996) 'interpenetrated globalisation' by which they claim that there is plainly no local not infected by the global, nor no global not present also in the local. They introduce the notion of tertiary locality, or the increasing participation in hyperreal or virtual communities via the Internet, as a signpost of our postmodern condition. If one is able to interpret Wilson and Dissanayake (1996) adequately, they seem to be championing the same paradoxical experience of becoming more globalised and more localised concurrently, or of pluralisation within a world-system. Yet they seem antagonistic to postmodernism, postcolonialism and multiculturalism as being too accommodating to global capital, and promote instead the notion of a 'transnational imaginary' in tracking the global/local nexus across geopolitical sites.

## Globalisation And Hybridity

The concept of 'glocalisation', or the localisation of global issues as well as the globalisation of local issues, is first attributed to Robertson (1992). Disbelieving that global-local issues, be they concerning politics, ecology, human rights or the media, should be thought of as a macro-micro dichotomy, he keeps company

with a growing number of contemporary thinkers who see the global embedded in the local and vice-versa. Featherstone (1990), for one, questions the conventional idea of a global culture as 'national culture writ large', and stresses instead the need to move away from the bi-polar dichotomies such as homogeneity/heterogeneity in regard to culture. Therefore he sees globalisation not as cultural imperialism but as symptomatic of the openness of postmodern societies to cultural eclecticism. More recently he has described globalisation as a process of showcasing of discordant world cultures within the home (Featherstone, 1995). Presumably this is achieved via the productivity of media industries and business franchises in the postmodern world.

Rather than think of globalisation as a late form of modernisation or 'Westernisation', Pieterse (1994) similarly prefers to describe it as postmodern hybridity. Hybrid social structures encompass both supranational and subnational regionalism within an understanding of a 'world society', in his view, while cultural hybridity can take a range of forms from mimicry, syncretism and creolisation to global *mélange* and counter-hegemony. Lent (1995) documents this phenomenon in Asia across the arenas of television, music, theatre, sport, food, movies and a range of popular culture, but singles out television for blame or credit for introducing the Westernisation element. Thus hybridity might indeed be a useful key for understanding the development of television-based cultures in the developing world.

The seminal work of Appadurai (1990) has been responsible for delineating the cultural flows which accompany globalisation, namely 'ethnoscapes' of business travellers, expatriates, immigrants, and refugees, 'technoscapes' of machinery, technology and software, 'finanscapes' of capital and securities, 'mediascapes' of images and information via print, television and film, and 'ideoscapes' of democracy, human rights and other Western ideologies. Though globalisation is not simply socio-cultural homogenisation, he thinks it uses various homogenising agents, advertising being a key one, which then incorporate the global into local culture and politics.

The phenomenon of cultural globalisation has certainly been accelerated through new electronic communications, including television broadcasting. The electronic distribution of images worldwide or what Appadurai terms 'mediascapes' could well be agents for the spread of 'ideoscapes' or ideologies of Western nation-states, political movements or corporations. Lash and Urry (1994) attempt to analyse such flows within the context of postmodern economies and societies, advising that pessimism over the future is caused unnecessarily by overly structuralist conceptualisations. They argue that all these 'scapes' are de-

territorialised, with 'mediascapes' becoming increasingly global in character, dominant over 'ideoscapes' and undermining notions of citizenship in favour of both global consumer identity and local re-constructed ethnicity. Whether transnational satellite television might be a constituent of one such 'mediascape' which taps also into 'ethnoscapes', is something that research should seek to discover in the Asian context.

Significant stimulants of these developments have been the growth of satellite television, convergence of electronic technologies, regulatory changes that accompanied shifts in political ideologies towards media privatization, lowered costs and decentralization of production, the rise of global media conglomerates, and the integration of national economies into the capitalist world system. Although Herman and McChesney (1997) recognize some passing national and regional resistance around the world, they consider the US model as archetypal of media globalization. This view would be challenged as myopic by researchers from Europe, Latin America and Asia in particular. Seeing global television as a symptom of wider processes of globalization and postmodernity, Barker (1997) makes the point that globalization is not to be read as uni-directional from the West but is indeed multi-directional, even multi-dimensional.

Questioning the simplistic notion of a global village, Ang (1996) argues that ubiquitousness of television in everyday life, available from transnational, regional and local sources, contributes to the chaos of communications processes in postmodern societies. In their edited anthology, Sinclair, Jacka and Cunningham (1996) propound a concept of geo-linguistic audience markets and subsidiary centres of television production. Their contributors, resident in India, the Middle East, Greater China, Canada and Australia, survey the growth not only of alternative English programming exporters in Canada and Australia, but also of new television production centres for the Hispanic, English, Arab, Chinese and Indian language-markets which are regional, diasporic and geo-linguistic. Another manifestation of globalization is the extensive practice of 'copycat television' or the format of television programs popular in one country being culturally adapted for another, which Moran (1998) has documented. All of these researchers point to the existence of a far more complex international television market than was in place when the earlier studies of US programming dominance and arguments for cultural imperialism were made.

## Conclusion

From this brief review it is evident that globalisation of the media, particularly television, has been spurred by greater

broadcast deregulation worldwide and the fact that new media technologies such as satellite and cable television render national media sovereignty quite an unrealistic goal. The consequent rise of global media corporations and the broadcast of media events globally, often 'live', have been predicated on the commercialisation of the television medium.

Multinational corporations wishing to market their products globally are thus major sponsors of transnational television via satellite, and their advertising agencies the catalysts. Ambivalence about the massive socio-cultural change which follows economic development in developing countries often causes their more nationalistic citizens to blame developed countries for the imposition of foreign cultures. Doubtless the growth of transnational media, international marketing and global advertising are all concomitants of and contributors to rapid social change.

While the print medium may have contributed to the development of the modern nation-state, the television medium seems to have taken this process much further towards the formation of globalised societies, through by-passing the need for literacy and using visual images to entertain instead. Perhaps via transnational satellites, the social and cultural impact of television may be coming full circle by uniting disparate ethnic communities in different nation-states, whether geographically close or distant, thus creating 'global villages' of quasi-homogeneous cultures. Since such electronic communication media make possible or heighten transnational networks of individuals and groups which then become dependent on them, one issue that remains to be addressed is whether such media are a cause or an effect of globalisation.

Nonetheless any apparent global homogenisation process need not necessarily be seen as deliberate cultural imperialism by developed countries of developing countries, but simply as a correlate of modernisation which developed countries themselves have experienced and incorporated into their cultures, albeit much earlier. While globalisation leads to superficial homogenisation of cultures, there is often a concurrent counter-movement towards heterogeneity through the rediscovery and reassertion of the local. As seen in the postmodern societies which have increasingly characterised the world of the late 20th century, the consequence is often cultural hybridity of both the global and the local.

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